

# **BLM Study Review of Hells Canyon Complex Studies**

## **Wolverine Survey in the Seven Devils Mountains of Hells Canyon**

### **Technical Report, Appendix E.3.2-29**

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#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The distribution and connectivity of wolverine populations in the northwestern United States is largely unknown. This study investigated the potential distribution of wolverine in the Northwest and the importance of the Seven Devils Mountains for connecting populations in Idaho and Oregon.

#### **2. CONCLUSIONS**

Mapping documented wolverine sightings suggested three relatively distinct subpopulations in (1) Cascade Mountains of Washington, (2) Cascade Mountains of Oregon, and (3) Rocky Mountains of Idaho. Sightings across mountainous habitats of Oregon also suggest that the Seven Devils Mountains may provide the only suitable habitat linking wolverine subpopulations in Idaho and Oregon. This study documented the first observation of a wolverine in the Seven Devils Mountains during a helicopter survey in March 1998. The lack of previous sighting suggested a limited dispersal between Oregon and Idaho. Low dispersal may impact the regional viability of wolverine by lowering the likelihood that suitable habitat patches are inhabited over time.

Although the study confirmed the presence of wolverine in the Seven Devils Mountains, the lack of previous sighting may indicate a small resident population with low interchange rates, raising questions about landscape barriers limiting movement to and from the Seven Devil Mountains. The deep gorges of Hells Canyon and the Salmon River Canyon surrounding the Seven Devils Mountains may function as a geographic barrier to population movement. Dominated by low-elevation steppe habitats, these two canyons dissect the Seven Devils Mountains from northeast Oregon and central Idaho.

#### **3. STUDY ADEQUACY**

The study is complete and meets intended research parameters. This study will address potential questions that may arise from project impacts and development of Protection, Maintenance, and Enhancement measures.

#### **4. BLM CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **CONCLUSIONS**

The study confirmed the presence of wolverine in the Seven Devils mountains. However, as noted in the study it appears that the lack of previous sighting may indicate a small resident population with low interchange rates. The study noted that mountainous habitats of the Seven Devils may provide the only suitable habitat linking wolverine subpopulations in Idaho and Oregon. However, the study also raises very important questions regarding landscape barriers limiting movement to and from the Seven Devil Mountains.

##### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Further investigations may be warranted concerning “landscape barriers” and the impacts of interchange rates for wolverine subpopulations in Idaho and Oregon. However, in regards to the re-licensing of three dams in Hells Canyon this study probably answers all pertinent questions that may arise.